

Creating Possibilities

ANNUAL
Report 2017



**Kentucky Office for the Blind
State Rehabilitation Council**

2017 State Rehabilitation Council



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Message from the SRC Chair



The Kentucky Office for the Blind (OFB) falls under the auspices of the Workforce and Education Cabinet. The agency was created in 1977, providing for the improved social and economic well being of the blind and visually impaired citizens of the Commonwealth. The Office for the Blind offers a plethora of consumer services which are directed at providing blind and visually impaired consumers the opportunity to maximize their quality of life as they deem appropriate and necessary through education and training. With proper education and training, blindness can be reduced to a physical nuisance!

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is responsible for advising OFB regarding the performance of a variety of issues including, but not limited to, eligibility, consumer, and operational services. The SRC was authorized by the Rehab Act of 1973, as amended in 1998, and requires the state vocational rehabilitation agency to establish a council. The 23 members are governor appointed and represent a variety of advocacy organizations along with representatives of business, industry and labor, the state education agency, and various other related entities.

Year after year, the Office for the Blind has amazed me with the ability to weather the storms as the struggle persists to provide consumer services with shrinking resources. The 2017 fiscal year reflects no relief for a very tight budget, which has forced the agency to continue to provide services with restrictions in personnel. The demand has, and continues to be, greater than the supply; however, OFB has risen to the challenge of not only providing services, but providing them with a great deal of quality. The Commonwealth has certainly been blessed with excellent leadership in this agency over the last several years. I would like to commend the present and immediate past Executive Directors for their leadership in displaying creativity, design, and when warranted, improvisation in going about the work of the Office for the Blind. I would be remiss in not acknowledging the hard and tireless work of the OFB staff. Their drive and dedication to serve has been second to none!

Now, in 2017, we are faced with the reality of two agencies becoming one as plans are formulated to combined the Office for the Blind and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The SRC will continue to be visible and to have an active voice in this process. A steering committee of SRC members, past and present, was organized to work closely with the administration and management to ensure that the specialized services provided by this agency are not compromised. We appreciate the opportunity to engage in discussions and to collaborate in the process. During this difficult transition, we are advocating for a separate budget and a separate director as we feel this is the best solution to ensure that no one in the blind and visually impaired community is left behind.

I am looking forward to a productive year for the SRC, despite the challenges that we continue to face. Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to my fellow council members who have placed their trust in me to serve as the SRC Chair this year.

Respectfully,

Todd E. Stephens, Chair

Message from Executive Director



How do you create and discover new possibilities for the future? This past year was certainly one for going beyond the path that leads to a known destination. The Office for the Blind (OFB) leadership and field staff ventured out into uncharted paths and unknown destinations. We faced changes that presented new challenges and demanded that we be creative in finding solutions and being open to new possibilities. Looking ahead to 2018 it appears we will continue on a path that is significantly different for us.

This year we implemented many changes in keeping with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) have provided us a very different path that requires us to deliver services in an entirely new way. Our summer camps for students were meaningful and well attended. Project CASE, financed by the Career Pathways grant, hosted trainings for employers, career center staff and partners, student STEM camps and apprenticeship events.

In spite of changes in leadership and adjustment to tragic loss, field staff have pulled together and provided services to over 1500 consumers and placed 250 in employment.

Although we cannot determine exactly what is going to happen in the future, we can anticipate changes and the implications they will have for the agency. We will view the upcoming year and the new path it brings as opportunities to be creative in pursuing new ideas; 2018 will be a year of making transformational changes and challenges.

Our focus will remain the same in providing meaningful supports for individuals who are blind and visually impaired to help them gain independence and achieve their vocational goals.

Cora McNabb,
Acting Executive Director

Employment Boot Camp

The McDowell Center's fourth Employment Boot Camp was held May 8-26, 2017. Five consumers attended, representing several areas of the state. Topics covered included labor market information, communication, self-awareness, job analysis, resume writing and mock interviews. The consumers attended a job fair the first week of the program. They dressed appropriately, took their resumes and introduced themselves to employers. The last week of Employment Boot Camp, each consumer participated in two mock interviews with volunteers from the community. The Boot Camp participants went home with a resume, cover letter and a portfolio of information to use in their job search. Three of the five participants have become employed. Of the 23 Employment Boot Camp participants the McDowell Center has worked with during the past four camps, 10 are currently employed. That is a success rate of 43%, which is very good for a three-week program.



Pre-Employment Transition Services

For the second year, the Office for the Blind (OFB) was involved with the Expanded Core Curriculum Camp for students who are deaf-blind. Students attending the camp have varying levels of vision and hearing loss. The camp, in conjunction with the University of Kentucky's Deaf-Blind Project and the UK Visual Impairment Program, brings eight deaf-blind students from across the state to Lexington to gain exposure to pieces of the Expanded Core Curriculum. The curriculum covers skills that students need to be successful in life after high school including assistive technology, career education, self-determination, and independent living skills, among others.

During the week-long camp in June, the students were able to explore their strengths and abilities, sometimes discovering qualities that they did not know they possessed. The students visited the Aviation Museum and the Blue Grass Airport to learn about this mode of transportation and job opportunities that exist in the field. They also planned and cooked a meal for themselves and their families. The students had to work together to decide on the menu and the necessary ingredients. They had to shop, purchase ingredients, and return to the campus to prepare the meal and desserts.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Expanded Core Curriculum Camp are the friendships that develop among the attendees. Many are isolated in their home communities, knowing no one else who is deaf-blind. This camp provides the opportunity for them to find friends who are like them.

The Expanded Core Curriculum Camp will continue next year, with four new students and four returning students who will act as mentors for the new students. Students that have completed two years of the camp will then be given the opportunity to participate in the South Eastern Transition Institute, where they will meet other individuals who are deaf-blind and continue to learn more about skills that they will need to be successful in their life after high school. The Office for the Blind looks forward to being able to continue working with our partners to provide this opportunity for students across the state who are deaf-blind.

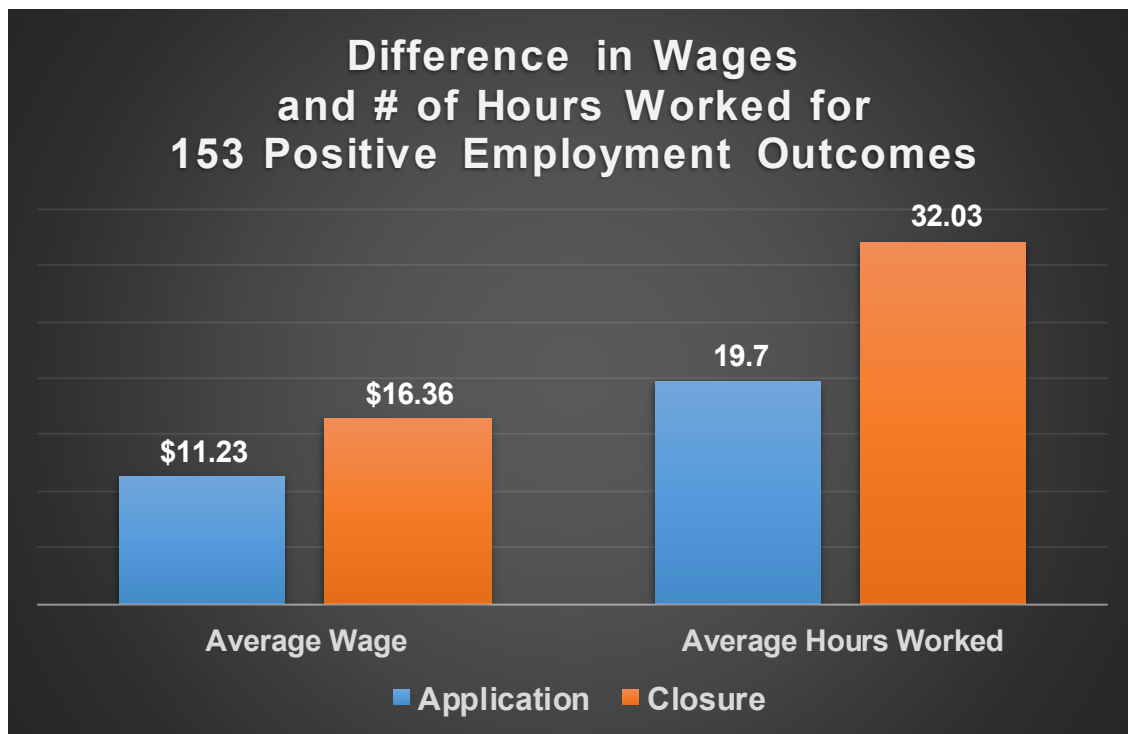
Pre-Employment Transition Services



Vocational Rehabilitation Statistics

Starting in October 2017, the Rehabilitation Services Administration went from reporting data on a Federal Fiscal Year to a Program Year. The Program Year, which runs from July 1- June 30 was shortened this year because of the change in October. Therefore, the data reflected below is for Program Year 2017, which ran October 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017.

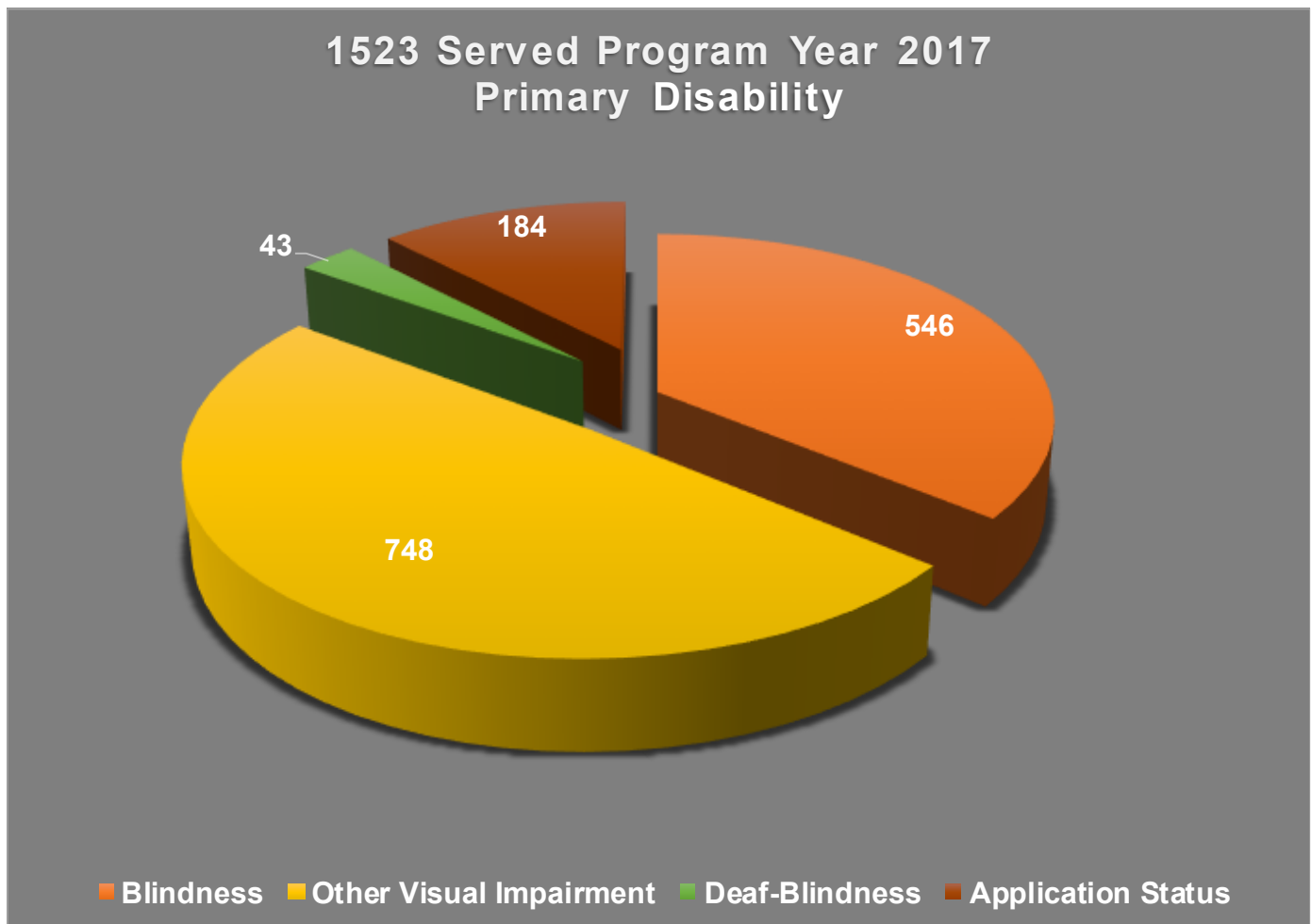
Primary Disability of Consumers Served



The Office for the Blind served 1523 consumers this year. When eligibility was determined, 546 individuals were determined to meet the definition of blindness, 748 were in the category of other visual impairment, and 43 met the definition of deaf-blindness. At the close of the Program Year, 184 remained in application status and were not yet placed in a disability category.

Vocational Rehabilitation Statistics

Difference in Wages and number of hours Worked



In Program Year 2017, the Office for the Blind successfully closed 153 individuals. At application, the average wage for these individuals was \$11.23 an hour, and they averaged working 19.70 hours per week. At the time of successful closure, these consumers were averaging hourly wages of \$16.36 an hour and working an average of 32.03 hours per week.

Project Case



The Office for the Blind has continued to have a strong focus on Career Pathways in 2017. Project CASE (Creating Access to Successful Employment) helps high school students and adults with disabilities understand what their options are in the skilled and technical trades. Project CASE

staff work on staying current with the in-demand certifications and degrees that businesses want, and pass that knowledge on to our vocational rehabilitation counselors and consumers. Six Career Pathways coordinators serving the KentuckianaWorks and EKCEP (Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program) workforce areas have assisted almost 30 individuals into jobs in healthcare, information technology/business services, and manufacturing, and have provided advising for many more to enter training in these sectors.

In the fall, the grant hosted an Apprenticeship Conference in Prestonsburg which featured panel speakers from employers using apprenticeships in Eastern Kentucky. These included Braidy Industries, Philips Diversified, Stober Drives, American Metal Works, and Mountain Companies. Secondary and postsecondary schools made up an employer panel, from Johnson Central, Kentucky Career and Technical College System, (KCTCS) and Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in Kentucky (TRACK) and FAME programs. Kentucky Labor Cabinet Secretary Derrick Ramsey, and Commissioner Ervin Dimeny and Deputy Commissioner Mike Donta spoke at the event, as well as Education and Workforce Development Cabinet's Commissioner, Beth Kuhn. Office for the Blind's Assistive Technology/ Employer Relations Specialist Jenny Tyree, provided an informative session on assistive technology in the workplace.

Project CASE entered the exciting world of drones, robots, computer coding, telemedicine and more through educational one and two-day Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) events for high school students in eastern Kentucky. These seven events served over 200 students with disabilities, and involved staff and faculty from EKCEP, KCTCS, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, OFB, and local high schools.

Overwhelmingly positive survey results revealed that the students greatly benefitted from having hands-on instruction, and learning about their own opportunities for training and careers in fast-growing, new fields.





Kentucky Business Enterprises

The Randolph-Sheppard Act was created by Congress in 1936 with the mission of providing jobs for blind individuals by granting them priority on vending operations on federal property. Under the Act, the Commonwealth recruits, trains, licenses and places persons that are visually impaired into vending sites across the state on federal, state and private property. The Kentucky Business Enterprise (KBE) program that oversees the Randolph-Sheppard program currently has 52 active vendors throughout the state from Paducah to Paintsville.

One pioneer of Kentucky's Randolph-Sheppard program is Fay Autry. Starting the program in June 1967, Ms. Autry has been in the KBE program for over 50 years. Over the years, she has seen many changes, not only in the KBE program, but also in women in the workforce. Ms. Autry brings a positive spirit into her business as she serves the women and men at Fort Campbell. Ms. Autry recalls the program's beginnings from running pencil stands to now operating the cafeteria on a large military site. Ms. Autry said, "As long as you're hardworking, you don't have to have a lot of education. You just have to be a hard worker, and you can be successful."

Congratulations, Ms. Autry, on your accomplishment! Thank you for serving those that protect us, and thank you for over 50 years of service to the Commonwealth of Kentucky, through the Kentucky Business Enterprise program.

To learn more about the Randolph-Sheppard program in Kentucky, please go to our website at <https://kcc.ky.gov/Office-for-the-Blind/Pages>.

Independent Living

The Office for the Blind offers Independent Living Services to promote increased levels of daily independence for persons with vision impairments. Independent Living Services may be provided within homes, workplaces and/or communities so individuals can achieve desired levels of activity and involvement. Persons age 55 and over with vision impairments receive independent living services through the Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) program and are given opportunities to increase their levels of independence within environments of their choice.

A range of independent living services and skills training is offered, including but not limited to, areas such as daily living, use of low-vision devices, and communications. Individualized assessments and training plans are completed with focus on each person's needs and goals. Independent Living and OIB services are available to persons living in all Kentucky counties and counselors can arrange training in individuals' homes, OFB offices, or community locations.

During FY2017, 770 persons living in 114 Kentucky counties received independent living services. Of the total number, 156 were less than 55 years of age and 614 were age 55 or above.

Consumer Success Stories



Cecil Cox, 46, was born with retinitis pigmentosa, a hereditary visual impairment. He had limited vision before becoming blind in his late 20s. He grew up in Kentucky and Indiana but moved back permanently to Kentucky at age 16. He split his high school years between the Kentucky School for the Blind and Campbellsville High School, where he graduated.

Cox said that after high school he had no idea what he wanted to do. When he was 21, his Office for the Blind counselor suggested that he apply to become a vendor with the agency's Kentucky Business Enterprise program. He applied and was accepted into the program which trains and places individuals who are blind or

visually impaired as self-employed operators of snack bars, dining facilities and automated vending facilities in public and private buildings across the Commonwealth. Cox remained a vendor in the Louisville area for 22 years until he had to resign his vending stand due to pressing family obligations.

In May 2015, Cox talked to an OFB counselor about getting back to work, but this time, he told her, he would like to try something different. He worked with the agency's vocational evaluator on determining his strengths and areas of interest.

In December 2015, he entered OFB's Charles McDowell Rehabilitation Center in Louisville as a student. He took classes in keyboarding, home management, and the new unified Braille code. Cox said that he wanted to take the home management class to work on learning to use a stove, a skill that he had never mastered. Now, he enjoys cooking his own meals at home.

Cox also decided to take a computer class to work on basic skills and learn how to use JAWS, a software screen reader program. After class, he would go to the computer lab to practice navigating the internet. He became very interested in technology for the first time in his life.

He worked with an assistive technology specialist to learn to use several products for people who are blind or visually impaired including a BrailleNote taker and a Victor Reader Stream, a handheld media player and digital audio recorder. He also learned to take advantage of all the voiceover features of his iPhone and iPad.



Consumer Success Stories

While still a student at the McDowell Center, Cox applied for a statistical clerk position at the U.S. Census Bureau call center in Jeffersonville, Indiana. He was hired and he trained for two weeks while still finishing his classes at the McDowell Center. He went to work in May 2016. At the call center, he is responsible for conducting three different phone surveys. He said he never dreamed he would ever be doing a computer job.

In October 2016, Cox had the third highest per hour rate of survey completion at the call center. The next month he finished fifth across all call centers in the nation. For fiscal year 2017, he was 126 percent over the average number of completions for his call center.

Since he's been at the Census Bureau, Cox has received two gains sharing awards. In January 2017, he was selected as the US Census Bureau Employee of the Month from among more than 1,000 employees at all three national call centers. Before the federal hiring freeze took effect, he trained two new employees who were visually impaired on how to do the job using JAWS software.

Cox received the 2016 Office for the Blind Consumer of the Year award. One of his instructors at the McDowell Center, Tonia Gatton said, "His talkativeness and sense of humor is a big part of what makes Cecil so good at his job. He quickly puts people at ease and makes them feel more like they're having a conversation rather than being interviewed for a survey."

Cox said, "I am proud of becoming more amenable to learning new things and being open minded enough to realize that there are endless things blind people can do. Just by learning new things you have more opportunities but you have to be willing to work and be independent. You can't let your vision loss be an excuse."

Among the new things he has done, getting a guide dog was a big challenge, he said, but it changed his life and allowed him freedom that he didn't have before. Unfortunately, his dog, Luke, developed cancer recently and passed away so Cox will be going through the process of getting another dog in the near future.

Of the services he received from the OFB, Cox said, "the computer training and encouraging staff were invaluable. They never got down on me when I got down on myself. The positive reinforcement that I got, and still get, from the staff has made all the difference."

Cox is very enthusiastic when speaking about his job. "It's perfect for me, I love talking to people, I like the flexibility of the hours and that what I do matters. It's nice to meet people and interact with sighted people and have them feel comfortable asking me about blindness issues. Being out there in the workplace helps to dispel the misconception that blind people can only sit home and draw a disability check."

Consumer Success Stories



Tilisha Starnes is the proud single mother of a son who is attending the University of Louisville and the primary caregiver of an elderly grandmother with Alzheimer's disease. She is a dance instructor and choreographer and performs in her church.

Starnes has been completely blind for nearly nine years. She was born with congenital cataracts and was told at age 11 that she would be blind by the time she reached adulthood. At age 18, she woke up one morning and had no vision in her left eye. A few years later she lost the remaining vision in her right eye. She now has two prosthetic eyes.

At the McDowell Center, Starnes earned her GED through the adult education program. Later, she returned to refresh her computer and assistive technology skills. She learned all the Microsoft Office programs and how to use the voiceover features of the iPhone. While there, she applied and was accepted into the OFB Employment Boot Camp Program, an intensive three-week program that teaches the skills necessary to independently obtain employment. An individualized action plan is developed for each participant and is the blueprint for finding and obtaining competitive employment in their home community.

One of the employers Starnes put on her action plan to contact was Goodwill. The Boot Camp participants went to a job fair where she met a representative from

Goodwill. Afterwards, she persisted and sent her resume and followed up about job openings. It was less than two months later that she went to work at the Goodwill store. She started her job in July, and by September, was featured in the monthly newsletter. According to her employer, Starnes is well liked by her coworkers and supervisors and is working at the speed of a sighted person.

Starnes' Boot Camp instructor, Kirsten Schmidt said, "Tilisha was very motivated to find employment. When she first started at her Goodwill location, TARC 3, the local on-demand bus system, did not go there. She worked with her supervisor and TARC to change that. Now TARC 3 takes her and picks her up from that location every day."

"Tilisha is a bright star and has an infectious personality. She brightens the room when she walks in. She always has a smile on her face and a positive outlook on life. She has a kind word for everyone she comes across in her daily activities. While at the McDowell Center, she motivated others and planned many activities for the other participants" Schmidt said.

"I'm independent, confident, outgoing and unstoppable. I intend to move up the ladder at Goodwill and will be running the store within a year," Starnes said jokingly. "I'm very thankful to have gotten employment where I have consistent pay and benefits, and they never treat me like I'm disabled."

She credits the staff at the McDowell Center with motivating her to strive to be successful.

Consumer Success Stories



Yiling Zou grew up in Chongqing, a large metropolitan city in China. At one year of age, he was diagnosed with macular hypoplasia, a rare condition involving the underdevelopment of the macula, a small area on the retina responsible for seeing in detail.

As he grew up and went through school, Zou found that he had to spend twice as much time reading the same material as the other students. He graduated with an undergraduate degree in marketing and went on to earn a law degree. He says that much of his success was due to memorizing the reading material as he went along.

“When you have an impairment, you use other strengths to compensate and do things differently,” he said.

After law school, Zou settled into a very lucrative but demanding position with a logistics firm where he arranged shipping to various countries. It required meticulous attention to detail.

After a while, he decided to fulfill his lifelong dream of coming to America so he moved to North Dakota where he had friends. Once there however, he decided that he wanted to live somewhere larger where there were more opportunities. He had friends in Louisville and decided to give Kentucky a try.

Zou never had to think about getting around in China because of the huge public transportation system. When he got to Louisville, he didn't want to have to depend on others for transportation so he went to get his driver's license. He found that he didn't meet the vision requirements but was told about a low-vision specialist who may be able to help him. The doctor referred him to the Office for the Blind in June 2016.

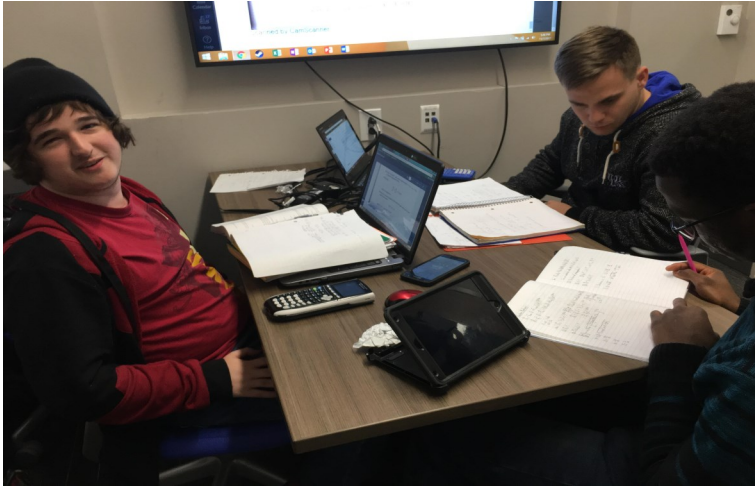
To receive services with the agency, Zou had to obtain United States permanent residency status. Once he received it, he worked with a vocational rehabilitation counselor on job placement. The counselor also put him on the list for Bioptic driving instruction. When he received a Bioptic monocular and a telescopic lens, he was taught to use them by an OFB Orientation and Mobility specialist. He then began his Bioptic driving training, passed the test and obtained his driver's license.

During this time, Zou's counselor set up job interviews and helped him apply for the Goodwill Cars to Work program. In September, he was accepted by the program and was able to purchase a car at an affordable price. Now that he could drive, it made finding employment much easier.

Zou got a job with the Horseshoe Casino in Indiana as a host with VIP guests. He escorts them, issues comps, books hotels and events for them and sometimes acts as a translator. He said he likes his job because it doesn't depend on his vision as much as his previous job in China. He said that he is a “people person” and loves meeting, being around, and helping the other staff and the guests. He said his job is important to him because it gives him a purpose socially, emotionally and financially. His goals are to work hard, have a good career and make America his home.

Zou is very grateful to the OFB staff who worked with him. “I sincerely thank the Office for the Blind who helped me meet my goals. I hope they will long continue their service to people with visual impairments for many more years.”

Consumer Success Stories



Tyler Burkhart is a senior at the University of Kentucky where he has a triple major in computer engineering, computer science and electrical engineering. He is a recipient of the prestigious four-year UK Presidential Scholarship and maintains a high grade point average. He will graduate in 2019 as a fifth-year senior, which is necessary in order to complete the additional coursework for his triple major.

A native of London, Kentucky, Burkhart was born with congenital nystagmus in both eyes and optic nerve hypoplasia. He is legally blind in one eye but has some vision in the other. He said he has always been curious and loves to learn. He played the saxophone in the marching band at South Laurel High School but said his studies have always come first.

Burkhart started receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services from OFB while still in high school. He has received financial assistance toward college textbooks, room and board, Orientation and Mobility training, assistive technology hardware and software, and Bioptic driving instruction. He passed the Bioptic driving test and received his license in July 2017.

Never having experienced perfect vision, Burkhart said he has learned to adapt to do whatever is necessary to get the job done. He explained that college is hard and that it takes him longer to read and write but he keeps up, even with a triple major. He admits that sometimes he has trouble pacing himself because he is very driven and motivated. He gives his all to everything he does so that, "at the end of the day, I can say I've done everything that I could," he said.

A turning point for Burkhart was being accepted into UK and receiving a competitive scholarship. He said that it gave him the confidence to know that he could tackle college with three majors. He would like to continue his education after graduation and pursue his master's and doctoral degrees.

"Having my Office for the Blind counselor to help me through the college process, and the peace of mind of having her to bounce things off of and make a plan with, have been invaluable to me," Burkhart said. "She consistently gives great guidance and advice."

He said he would also be at a big disadvantage without the laptop and software, and the engineering calculator that his assistive technology specialist provided for him.

Burkhart's OFB counselor, Twyla Hammons, said Tyler looks for ways to be involved in activities to help younger students such as assisting her and the Southeastern Co-op with a transition fair at Union College.

"I am very proud of this young man and I know he will succeed in his career. I feel he has a great story to tell about his life, and his disabilities and how he has overcome any obstacle that has been in his way," said Hammons.

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